

## ***Proverbs also have nine lives:* the use of proverbs in advertising**

Cristina Tejedor Martínez<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract**

Proverbs and sayings are a social product and are part of the linguistic competence of the speakers of a language. They contain and transmit cultural elements of languages. Moreover, proverbs are firmly anchored in the languages' historical heritage. Both the linguistic and cultural data contained in proverbs are shared by most speakers and link them to past speakers. Proverbs and sayings express and strengthen ideas. Thus, proverbs play a role in both general and specialized languages. However, several authors have attested to a significant decline in their use; others explain that their function has changed, but their popular currency has remained constant. Although the use of proverbs may have declined, this paper contributes to highlighting the long life of proverbs and proverbial phrases that remain in use even today in the specialized language of advertising in Spanish and English. A corpus of advertisements in both languages has been collected and analyzed. Most of the examples found were in Spanish, although some examples in English were also collected. It was found that proverbs are still used in advertising campaigns for products and services and, in most cases, the proverbs used have been adapted or modified. Since proverbs reflect the cultural elements of a language and convey these elements, the process of adapting or modifying proverbs is intended to relate the culture to the product or service. The use of proverbs may have declined in general language, but they still maintain a role in the specialized language of advertising.

**Keywords:** paremiology; proverbs; culture; Spanish and English language of advertising.

### ***Proverbs also have nine lives: el uso de refranes en la publicidad***

#### **Resumen**

Los refranes son un producto social y forman parte de la competencia lingüística de los hablantes de una lengua. Contienen y transmiten elementos culturales de las lenguas. Además, los proverbios están firmemente anclados en el patrimonio histórico de las lenguas. Tanto los datos lingüísticos como los culturales que contienen los refranes son compartidos por la mayoría de los hablantes y los vinculan a los hablantes del pasado. Los refranes expresan y refuerzan ideas. Por ello, los refranes desempeñan un papel tanto en la lengua

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<sup>1</sup> Universidad de Alcalá (España), [cristina.tejedormartinez@uah.es](mailto:cristina.tejedormartinez@uah.es)

general como en las lenguas especializadas. Sin embargo, varios autores han atestiguado un descenso significativo de su uso; otros explican que su función ha cambiado, pero su vigencia popular se ha mantenido constante. Aunque tal vez el uso de los refranes haya disminuido, este trabajo contribuye a destacar la larga vida de los refranes y frases proverbiales que permanecen en uso aún hoy en la lengua especializada de la publicidad en español y en inglés. Se ha recopilado y analizado un corpus de anuncios en ambos idiomas. La mayoría de los ejemplos encontrados estaban en español, aunque también se recogieron algunos ejemplos en inglés. Se ha comprobado que los refranes se siguen utilizando en las campañas publicitarias de productos y servicios y, en la gran mayoría de casos, los refranes utilizados se han adaptado o modificado. Dado que los refranes reflejan los elementos culturales de una lengua y transmiten estos elementos, el proceso de adaptación o modificación de los refranes tiene la intención de relacionar la cultura con el producto o servicio. Puede que el uso de los refranes haya disminuido en la lengua general, pero siguen manteniendo un papel en el lenguaje especializado de la publicidad.

**Palabras clave:** paremiología; refranes; cultura; lenguaje especializado de la publicidad en español e inglés.

**Summary.** 1. Introduction. 2. Proverbs and sayings: an outline. 3. Methodology. 4. Proverbs and sayings in the language of advertising: results and analysis. 5. Conclusion. 6. Bibliographical references.

*"(...) sé más refranes que un libro y vienénseme tantos juntos a la boca cuando hablo que riñen por salir unos con otros, pero la lengua va arrojando los primeros que encuentra, aunque no vengan a pelo. Mas yo tendré cuenta de aquí adelante de decir los que convengan a la gravedad de mi cargo, que en casa llena, presto se guisa la cena, y quien destaja, no baraja, y a buen salvo está el que repica, y el dar y el tener, seso ha menester". (Miguel de Cervantes - Don Quijote, capítulo XLIII)<sup>2</sup>*

## 1. Introduction

It seems that the use of proverbs and sayings is dying out, as some authors have pointed out, for example, Antonio Burgos (1990), also Corpas Pastor (1996: 166) who explains that: "Hoy día (...) las paremias están en claro retroceso en la mayor parte de las lenguas europeas: el empleo de estas unidades se resiente sobre todo en las jóvenes generaciones, pues las paremias se perciben como marca de retraso cultural y de inferioridad social". Hernando Cuadrado (2010: 65) also believes that proverbs' use has diminished: "El uso del refrán en la lengua hablada en la actualidad ha disminuido considerablemente. Las personas mayores los emplean cada vez menos y los jóvenes apenas los utilizan, llegando a reconocer, como mucho, alguno que otro cuando los oyen o los ven citados en algún texto impreso". Sevilla and Cantera (2002: 13) even offer an explanation for this phenomenon based on the fact that proverbs "reflejan un mundo irreversiblemente pasado" (2002: 256), and regarding proverbs, they believe that

(...) su presencia va disminuyendo en los últimos decenios, debido a que muchos de los consejos contenidos en los refranes aluden a una sociedad rural y no responden a la actual época tecnológica. Han ido desapareciendo de la lengua hablada y, al no oírlos, no almacenamos en la memoria estas manifestaciones del lenguaje repetido, cuya comprensión y memorización nos resulta también difícil por los arcaísmos o palabras en desuso que contienen en muchos casos. (Sevilla and Cantera 2002, 256)

Such views overlook the fact that while the role of the proverb and sayings has changed, maybe their less frequent usage can be attested, but its popular currency has remained constant (Simpson 1990: x) and it cannot be said that proverbs are on their way out. It may be true that, as Ridout and Witting (1969: 7) state, "(...) a proverb may have disappeared in one part of the English-speaking world and yet be very much alive in another. Then within a single country a certain proverb or saying may still be in use among rural people though it has completely disappeared from the cities". Sevilla and Cantera (2001: 13) share the same opinion and, if previously they had noticed some proverbs fallen into desuetude, they remain optimistic by stating that

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<sup>2</sup> <https://cvc.cervantes.es/literatura/clasicos/quijote/edicion/parte2/cap43/default.htm>

Si bien muchos de ellos [proverbs] ya no se emplean, no se puede afirmar que estemos asistiendo a la muerte de las paremias populares, ya que los refranes morales siguen vivos, así como bastantes frases proverbiales, gracias a su sentido alegórico o idiomático que les permite aplicarse a multitud de situaciones.

With the same certainty, Etxabe Díaz asserts that proverbs are still alive and the paremiological field is in a constant change, being enriched with new paremiae:

(...) el refrán no ha muerto. Las fórmulas tradicionales no han desaparecido y siguen apareciendo nuevos dichos que sintetizan el saber popular. Los refranes, lejos de convertirse en reliquias lingüísticas, siguen rematando discursos de políticos, zanjando discusiones entre amigos e ilustrando consejos dados por los padres a sus hijos. Es decir, siguen siendo elementos llenos de contenido y expresividad: están vivos. (Etxabe Díaz 2012: 8)

Proverbs' importance and survival in time is also underlined by other authors:

Esta herencia ancestral que constituyen los proverbios representa un bagaje de inestimable valor, imprescindible para interpretar la realidad de la vida misma. Son semblanzas humanas y divinas. Vivencias recurrentes de eterna actualidad. Filosofía de recia hondura que versa sobre la vida y la muerte. El tiempo pasa, la lengua cambia, los proverbios permanecen. (Casado Conde et al. 1999: 6)

Proverbs and sayings continue to provide the sauce to relish the meat of ordinary speech (Simpson 1990: xi). They have survived throughout centuries and adapted to our modern, urban and classy society, being thus seen like "old wisdom in new clothing", as Mieder (1993: 58) calls them. Nowadays new proverbs (and new uses of proverbs) continue to appear based on actual referees and regarding the present society we live in. As Etxabe Díaz (2012: 8) points out

Tanto en el ámbito coloquial como en los medios de comunicación, pueden escucharse nuevas fórmulas que reproducen la estructura básica de los refranes pero que, adaptándose a los tiempos en que vivimos, toman nuevos referentes para aludir a situaciones y sentimientos universales (amor, ambición, relaciones laborales, etc.).

And the author provides examples such as *A entrenador nuevo, victoria segura*; *Dime con quién chateas y te diré quién eres*; *A preguntas embarazosas, respuestas anticonceptivas*; *Si trabajas por tu cuenta, nunca te salen las cuentas*; *Cuando el disco de tu vecino veas formatear, pon el tuyo a escanear*. In spite of the possibility of some being criticized due to their cynical (*Marriage is a lottery*), fatalistic (*Call no man happy till he is dead*), misogynistic (*A bad woman is worse than a bad man*), etc. value, "proverbs can only be judged as a whole, and as a whole they cover an astonishingly wide range of human experience" (Ridout & Witting 1969: 18).

Nonetheless, as Mieder (1993: 54) points out, "Proverbs continue to be effective verbal devices and culturally literate persons, both native and foreign, must have a certain paremiological minimum at their disposal in order to participate in meaningful oral and written communication"; because proverbs are, in fact, "un tratado de normas que tienen como finalidad facilitarnos el camino en esta vida, dada su experiencia" (Conde Tarrío 2011: 7). Proverbs and sayings give speakers a special ability to persuade the listener, because of their moral, timeless authority.

An Ibo proverb thematically summarizes that *Proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten* (Gibbs 2001: 174). Fernández-Sevilla (quoted in Hernando Cuadrado 2010: 46) considers proverbs to be "unidades de lengua, que están fijadas y forjadas y que el hablante ha memorizado y aduce cuando lo cree oportuno". As Mieder (1993: XVII) states, "when we use proverbs, we wish to strengthen our arguments or explanations with traditional wisdom that supposedly has withstood the test of time." Thus, proverbs and sayings become, according to Díaz Padilla:

[...] comodines de que dispone la lengua, susceptibles de ser empleados en las más diversas situaciones y de los que se desprende siempre una enseñanza para el interlocutor; pueden ser utilizados para esta función cuando su adecuación a las circunstancias en que aparecen es la apropiada a su significado. Mediante ellos el hablante resume lo dicho, justificándolo con una cita que le confiere autoridad debido a su vigencia en el pueblo". (Díaz Padilla, quoted in Hernando Cuadrado 2010: 46)

Moreover, as Sevilla and Cantera (2001: 25) state, proverbs "ayudan a salir airoso de las situaciones difíciles, ya que cualquier aspecto de la vida humana se ve reflejado en ellos, su campo de aplicación presenta una gran variedad dada su amplitud temática". In fact, Mieder's *Dictionary of American Proverbs* (1992) lists thousands of entries collected from oral speech between 1945 and 1985, and Whitney's collection *Modern Proverbs and Proverbial Sayings* (1989) contains almost six thousand entries taken from 20<sup>th</sup> century books, magazines, and newspapers. Carbonell Basset's *The New Dictionary of Current Sayings and Proverbs, Spanish and English* (2005) offers a list of 700 English and Spanish proverbs and sayings with 1800 real, contemporary citations collected from newspapers, the Internet and contemporary books. This clearly illustrates proverbs and sayings' existence and usage today.

This paper presents an overview of the presence of proverbs and sayings in the specialized language of advertising in English and Spanish. Examples of proverbs and sayings in both languages in the specialized field are provided with the aim of showing their use and proving their role in order to claim the continuity of proverbs in the case of the specialized language of advertising<sup>3</sup>.

## **2. Proverbs and sayings: an outline**

A justification for the study of proverbs and sayings, if any is required, may be found in its usefulness for philology, psychology, folklore, and for literary studies, to help to establish a text or to interpret a meaning. In fact, proverbs are "everywhere – from Carl Sandburg's poetry to art, psychology, politics, and advertisements for cars and cameras. Proverbs show us something about how we think" (Mieder, quoted in Wolkomir 1992). Besides, they still have a role in the specialized language described advertising. We can attest that nowadays proverbs and sayings still represent a very useful and effective tool, maybe not such at hand

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for the youngest generation, but having the same impact on the listener regardless of who utters them. *A proverb is worth a thousand words* remains a truism no matter what the context proverbs are used in. Besides, as Mieder (1993: XVII) points out

Proverbs don't always have to be didactic and prescriptive; they can also be full of satire, irony, and humour. As such the thousands of proverbs that make up the stock of proverbial wisdom of all cultures represent not a universally valid but certainly a pragmatically useful treasure.

We should also remember that proverbs and sayings are a link between us and our ancestors and a culture. They will always "connect us with our past, with the thoughts and emotions that our predecessors experienced in situations curiously similar to ours today" (Simpson, in the *Foreword* of Carbonell Basset's Dictionary, 2005). Similarly, Baños & Guardiola (2001: 39) state that, "el desprecio por los refranes conlleva, al fin y al cabo, la negación de la propia identidad". Proverbs reflect the cultural elements of a language and transmit these culture elements when being used. Proverbs and sayings are still an important part of contemporary language. In fact, proverbs appear in many contexts, such as mass media, especially in journalism (as newspaper and magazine headlines), advertising (as traditional or innovative slogans), popular songs (folk, country and western, rock-and-roll), illustrations (cartoons, comic strips, caricatures), book titles, etc.

Proverbs and sayings are short sentences that usually have rhyme, through which the result of a long, everyday life experience of people is expressed metaphorically, concisely and suggestively. Proverbs and sayings have their sources in life experience; in fact, they are "generally known sentences of the folk which contain wisdom, truth, moral and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation" (Mieder 1993: 4). Proverbs have a distinctive manner of characterizing abstract themes in concrete ways. They can create a special bond of intimacy between speakers and link them to past speakers and community norms. As Bakhtin argued, no word or utterance can be spoken without echoing how others understand and have used it before:

The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's concrete contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. (Bakhtin, quoted in Gibbs 2001: 173)

This suggests that meaning does not depend on each speaker and listener alone. The use of proverbs and sayings allows speakers to convey their personal meanings by echoing a whole tradition of wisdom and beliefs shared by members of their cultural community. In each language group there are proverbs that have the highest frequency, which means that they are the most known and used by the speakers of that language. This number of proverbs are named the paremiological minimum. Sevilla Muñoz (in Pamies Bertrán 2011: 77) defines the paremiological minimum as "conjunto de enunciados sentenciosos estables más conocidos por una

mayoría significativa de los hablantes de una comunidad sociocultural concreta. Dicho mínimo paremiológico está integrado principalmente por refranes y frases proverbiales". Ruxãndoiu (2003: 232) considers that "To be used in an *ad hoc* context (a concrete communication act), proverbs must exist in the memory of the individual and of the group (s)he belongs to, as independent units, in relation to a generic context (within the coordinates of a certain cultural horizon)." Therefore, proverbs and sayings reflect the cultural values or attitudes of a particular society. They attempt to express a piece of practical advice or wisdom in a concise and memorable manner, and, sometimes, different languages can share the same ideas, but they are expressed in different ways.

In certain social situations, proverbs and sayings may be used as verbal strategies to express someone's thoughts without assuming the responsibility of their words. These being attributed to someone else that may be either a specific person (in the case of Wellerisms, e.g. the mother in *Nothing is lost for asking, as my mother used to say*) or an anonymous one, referring to a whole community, group, etc. When uttering a proverb, the user is, in fact, citing another person, as Colombi points out:

Los refranes como enunciados-hechos (fijos, invariables) constituyen un inventario dentro de la lengua. Un hablante cuando usa un refrán está apoyándose en todo un bagaje tradicional de enunciados-hechos. Vistos de esta manera los refranes son una especie de "cita", salvo la diferencia que, cuando un hablante usa un proverbio, está citando al otro y a todos al mismo tiempo. (Colombi, 1989: 3)

Proverbs and sayings must not be randomly used; the user must take into account also their function. According to Corpas Pastor (1996: 228), proverbs "constituyen fundamentalmente actos de habla informativos y actitudinales (...), es decir, asertivos y directivos (...)." Thus, Manero Richard (2007: 160) distinguishes between:

- proverbs with a descriptive meaning, which are assertive and are the most frequent, e.g. *A word to the wise is enough*.
- proverbs with a prescriptive meaning or imperative actions, which are usually "norms of behavior", e.g. *Don't bite off more than you can chew*.

Norrick (quoted in Colombi 1989: 50) classifies proverbs taking into account their functional role in conversation. Thus, according to him, proverbs are: a) evaluative comments with didactic tone; b) evaluative arguments within longer speeches; and c) proverbs that apply directly to a situation, syntactically independent of their text/context and with no evaluative function.

The situations proverbs and sayings appear to determine their function. Ruxãndoiu (2003: 201-202) considers that the proverbs' functions vary according to their position in the contexts they are used in. Therefore, placed in an initial position, a proverb anticipates the meaning of the context it is used in. Thus, the interlocutor is prepared for the coming message. e.g., "*They say a cat has nine lives and an amazing story of survival in New Jersey certainly supports that. Police...*" (CBS New York, NY, 9 Feb 2004, US; cited in Carbonell Basset 2005: 49).

Positioned in the middle of the context, a proverb or saying has a stronger power of argumentation, of talking the interlocutor into the message of the context. Sometimes, it can also have the effect of an epiphonema, being a conclusion of the previous part of the context and a foreshadowing of the following part. E.g. "...installing burglar alarms if burglary weren't illegal. **It's putting the cart before the horse. If email carries a pricetage...**" (King5.com, WA, 3Feb 2004, US; cited in Carbonell Basset 2005: 48). A proverb sited in final position has a conclusive function, the message expressed by the context being confirmed by the proverb. E.g., "We're focusing on the employees, not the residents. **We're putting the cart before the horse here.**" (Henderson Gleaner, KY, 3 Feb 2004,US; cited in Carbonell Basset 2005: 48).

For the proper use of a proverb, for its a hundred percent effect on the target public [= the interlocutor(s)], the utterers must choose the correct proverb from the paremiological minimum they have knowledge of because, as Gonzalo Torrente Ballester observes in the *Prologue* of the dictionary of Luis Junceda,

La experiencia de la vida no es uniforme ni coherente; a veces, sus conclusiones son contradictorias, y los resúmenes en que se expresan, los refranes, llevan el mismo color, a veces blanco, a veces negro, de tal manera que para la misma situación o el mismo suceso podemos encontrar el sí y el no, según convenga. (Torrente Ballester 1995: 9)

Besides, one must be a lot more cautious since, when uttering a proverb, you are speaking in the name of a whole community. This is clearly pointed out by Torrente Ballester who states that:

El valor objetivo de los refranes es discutible. A veces son o no pasan de ser fórmulas sintéticas de verdades obvias; otras, su alcance o sus pretensiones son de más profunda enjundia y bien escogidos y ordenados pueden servir de sostén de toda una filosofía de la vida, que a su manera expresan, encerrando un sentido, una sabiduría, o un consejo que solo de esa manera impersonal, tradicional, nos atrevemos a dar. No es nadie el que habla, sino todos; no es un saber de ahora, sino de siempre. (Torrente Ballester 1995: 10)

According to Charteris-Black's study (1999) (quoted by Gramley 2001: 149), proverbs are rarely used in their canonical or citation form, but variations of them appear. These variations refer to proverbs which:

- a) are contracted: *He is refusing **to give an inch** < Give him an inch and he'll take a mile.*
- b) include substitution: *The proof of the **cake** is the eating < The proof of the pudding...*
- c) show up an antonym: *All that glitters **is** gold < All that glitters is not gold*
- d) are expanded: *Casting **synthetic** pearls before real swine < Do not throw/cast pearls before swine.*

An advantage of the proverbs/sayings and advertisements is that both have common characteristics, as Piñel López (1997: 494) pointed out, "tanto el anuncio como el refrán han de ser breves, fáciles de comprender y de retener en la memoria y se repiten con frecuencia". In fact, much of the variation in proverbs and sayings



is to be found in advertising, and it is probably related to the function of advertisements and the importance of attracting the consumers' attention that is often achieved by such changes.

### **3. Methodology**

The intention of this study is to demonstrate that the use of proverbs and sayings is still current in the language of advertising, so we considered it necessary to search for advertisements published in Spanish or English, as these are the most widely spoken languages in the world as first or second language. The purpose is to study the examples and demonstrate that the use of proverbs in advertising is still a technique that is being used, so it is considered effective.

To compile the corpus of advertisements that had a proverb and saying or made reference to them, the websites of companies, brands and services were searched for six months, from September 2023 to February 2024. The advertising campaigns did not always indicate the date, only in some cases did the date appear or could be found. A total of 50 advertisements were collected and became part of the working corpus. Most of them were published in Spanish, 84 % of the total.

Once the corpus of advertisements was compiled, the proverbs have been classified adapting Charteris-Black's proposal (1999). We have been established five options for the classification of the advertisements based on how proverbs and sayings have been used or modified:

- a) keeping the canonical form;
- b) the substitution of one or more elements of the proverb;
- c) the adaptation of the proverb, making several changes;
- d) the use of an antonym for any of the elements of the proverb;
- e) the expansion of the proverb adding some elements.

In the next section, we will report on the results obtained after the classification. A selection of these advertisements will be discussed in order to explain the intention of the use of these proverbs as part of the advertising campaigns.

### **4. Proverbs and sayings in the language of advertising: results and analysis**

The effectiveness of advertisements in promoting products, services and causes is becoming even more important nowadays. The goal of advertising is to reach people and entice them to buy, so promotional messages are key in this tactic to get customers. Therefore, the language (verbal communication) behind each example is important, the linguistic resources used to create the message that would persuade the customers should be meticulously chosen. One of the linguistic elements which the language of advertising employs to gain and retain the attention of their audience is proverbs and sayings. In fact, as Mieder and Mieder (1977: 308) pointed out:

Although one would perhaps have to agree that proverbs are today used less frequently in their traditional way, i.e. as a didactic piece of wisdom, one glance at the advertising of any magazine or newspaper shows that proverbs have become the most popular folklore item used by Madison Avenue.

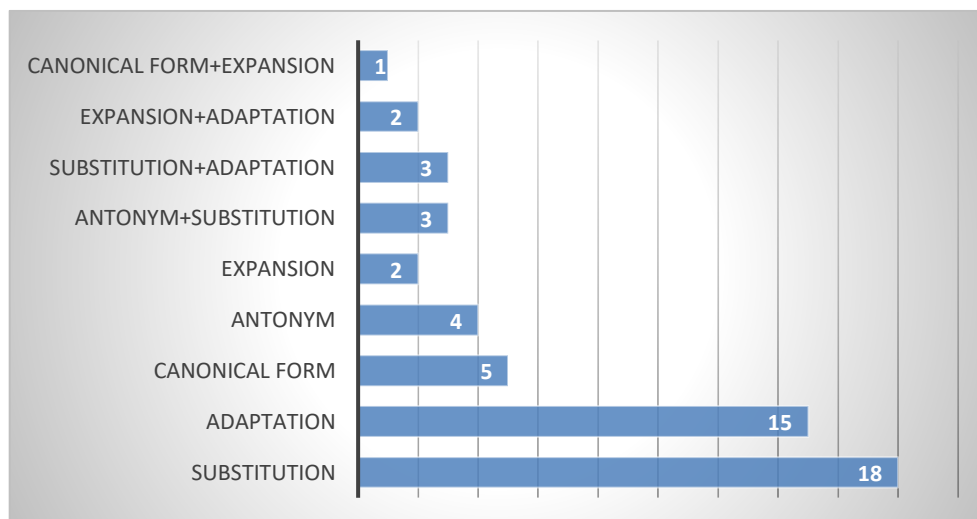
The advantages of structuring an advertising text around a proverb or saying are numerous. On the one hand, it plays with a familiar element and, on the other hand, its structure is flexible enough to be filled with a variety of content without losing the resonance of the traditional. Despite the variation or modification of the proverb or saying, customers will always recognise the structure, even if the content departs from the known form. The following table shows the corpus of advertisements created using proverbs or sayings and the classification of these examples.

ADVERTISEMENTS	CLASSIFICATION
Al mal tiempo, ¡buenos planes!	substitution
Al mal tiempo, ¡buena música!	substitution
Al buen tiempo, mejor escapada	antonym+substitution
Abril que truena, anuncia cosecha buena	canonical form
Mayo florido, en flor el olivo y granado los trigos	canonical form
Si un buen fin de semana quieres pasar, los apartamentos Rurales Señora Clara has de visitar	adaptation
Nunca digas: este esmalte no lo compraré	expansion
Es de bien nacido zamparse cada semana un cocido	expansion
El que los domingos no come fabada asturiana, no es persona entre semana	expansion+adaptation
A quien madruga, Google le ayuda	substitution
Todo depende de la Cristal con que se mire	substitution
Más vale prevenir que formatear	substitution
No hay <b>pollo</b> fresco que por bien no venga!	substitution
A <b>buen</b> tiempo, buenísima casa	antonym+substitution
Gallina vieja hace buen caldo, Gallina Blanca lo hace mejor	canonical form+expansion
Hair today, gone tomorrow	substitution
Hear today, gone tomorrow	substitution
Heir Today, gone tomorrow	substitution
Think Before You Drink	adaptation
Si hacer el bien es de locos, contagia tu locura	adaptation
You can't buy happiness but you can buy nutella and that's kind of the same thing!	substitution+adaptation
Como en casa, en <b>cualquier</b> sitio	antonym
Llame a las cosas por su nombre, al pan ...pan y al vino... Toro	substitution
Nuestro tomate ha nacido con un pan bajo el brazo	substitution
Hay cosas que el dinero no puede comprar. Para todo lo demás, Mastercard	adaptation
Amor cervecero, amor verdadero	adaptation
If you hate something, change something	antonym
Si la vida es un juego para un niño, entonces tú eres su capitán de equipo	adaptation+substitution
You're not you when you're Hungry. Snickers satisfies	adaptation
Gota a gota hacemos la diferencia	adaptation
No dejes para mañana, lo que puedes comprar hoy	substitution
If your coffee isn't perfect, well make it over. If it's still not perfect make sure you're in Starbucks	adaptation
No siempre el mejor camino es el más corto. Todo va mejor con Coca-Cola	adaptation
Gran sabor, pequeños precios	adaptation+substitution
Un hogar no nace, un hogar se hace	antonym+substitution

Si buscas km0 o de ocasión, en Wallapop tienes un montón	adaptation
Con el chat directo con el vendedor, seguro que encuentras tu coche en Wallapop	adaptation
El que una furgoneta está buscando, en Wallapop tendría que estar mirando	adaptation
Después de la tormenta siempre viene la idea	substitution
¡Al mal tiempo buena Marca!	substitution
Las cuentas claras y el vaso espumoso	substitution
a) En abril, sequías mil. / b) Ni el 1 de mayo nos podemos poner el sayo. / c) Junio, juniete, seco, sequete / d) Cuando el grajo vuela bajo, hace calorazo. Y es que lo que compramos afecta tanto al planeta que está cambiando nuestros refranes de toda la vida.	a)antonym b)adaptation c)substitution d)antonym
OjOs que no ven, Facebook te lo cuenta	adaptation
Nunca dejes para mañana el corte que puedes hacerte hoy	substitution
A buen hambre no hay pan duro	canonical form
Que no te den vaca por buey...	substitution
Es más caro tomar una mala decisión inmobiliaria que acudir a profesionales que te asesoren para evitarla	adaptation
El que tiene tienda que la atienda	canonical form
Culo veo, culo quiero	canonical form
La cortesía no ocupa lugar, llévela siempre consigo	substitution

**Table 1.** Classification of advertisements.  
Source: Own elaboration.

The analysis of the advertisements from the corpus shows that in most cases (90.5 %) different kinds of variation of the proverbs used for the advertisements appear, as one option or a combination of two options, modifying the proverb or saying. In fact, thirty-nine examples show one option of variation, nine examples more than one option and only five examples use the canonical form, a total of 53 examples analysed, the reason being that in one of the advertisements four proverbs are included. The distribution of the analysed advertisements is presented in graph 1.



**Graph 1.** Distribution of the advertisements classified.  
Source: Own elaboration.

Proverbs carry a meaning that we can easily recognize, just hearing or reading the proverb grabs our attention, as it sounds familiar, and the product or idea presented to the consumers is felt as something close and, therefore, we are attracted to the products or services being advertised. As it is illustrated in the examples extracted from one webpage that provides different offers, coupons and discounts, *Atrapalo.com: Al mal tiempo, ¡buenos planes!* and *Al buen tiempo, ...¡buena música!* (figure 1 and 2); and a travel webpage *Groupalia.com: Al buen tiempo, mejor escapada* (figure 3). One proverb has been used for the three examples, *Al mal tiempo, buena cara*, and some elements have been substituted: *cara <> planes/música* in the first two cases; or the substitution of two elements: *buena<>mejor* and *cara <> escapada* has been combined by using an antonym in the first part of the slogan: *mal<>buen*. A third example has used the same proverb for another advertisement in a recent campaign of a store, *A buen tiempo, buenísima casa*. In this case, an antonym is used to modify the first part of the proverb, *mal<>buen*, and the last element is substituted, *cara<>casa*. Substitution and antonymy have been the techniques used to modify this proverb for the three advertising texts.

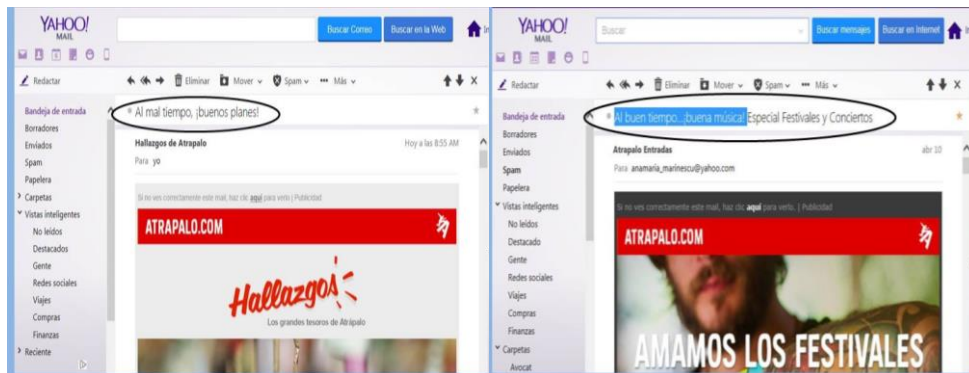


Figure 1 and 2. Examples from Atrapalo.com.  
Source: Own elaboration.

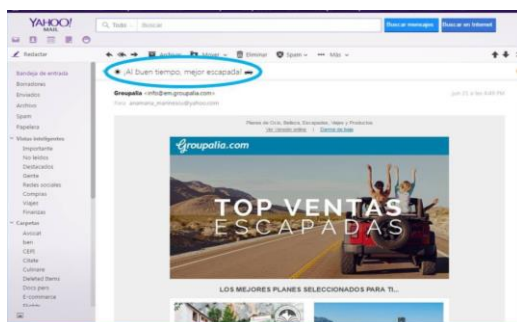


Figure 3. Example from Groupalia.  
Source: Own elaboration.

Other examples have been found in the promotion of events at the *Centro de educación ambiental 'Caserío de Henares'* from San Fernando de Henares (Madrid). They usually insert proverbs in the activities programmes in order to make them more attractive and to reach a wider target public. We can illustrate with the activities schedules of two months, April: *Abril que truena, anuncia cosecha buena* and May: *Mayo florido, en flor el olivo y granado los trigos*. The canonical forms are used to directly relate the proverbs to the activities developed during these months at the centre. Other cases have been found in which the canonical form is used to promote a restaurant, *A buen hambre no hay pan duro*, a beer brand, *El que tiene tienda que la atiende*, or a watch, *Culo veo, culo quiero*. These examples use proverbs to ironically stand out the products and services that they refer to. The restaurant's proverb indicates that when one is hungry, one should eat what one can find and make no qualms about the quality of what is available or what is offered, but what it really wants to emphasise is the good food on offer at this restaurant. In this case, the canonical form is kept but the advertisement's meaning is the opposite of the original proverb. The proverb in the case of the Swatch watch (see figure 4) criticises the capricious, who crave whatever they see, but the intention is to point out this product that many people want, as the image of the advertisement makes clear. Similarly, the meaning of the slogan contrasts with the proverb's meaning, even though it keeps the canonical form.



Figure 4. Example of advertisement  
Source: Own elaboration.

The current advertising promotion of a rural tourist lodging<sup>4</sup> also resorts to the linguistic structure of a proverb, as they indicate in the web page: *Como dice el refrán: Si un buen fin de semana quieres pasar, los apartamentos Rurales Señora Clara has de visitar*. In this case, the syntactic structure of proverbs is used as an advertising hook, as customers will be able to recognise the typical structure and rhythm of the proverb in the slogan. The intention is to attract potential guests to the accommodation by inventing a saying that relates to the idea of resting to this guest house. Another example that has adapted this familiar structure of a proverb is *Si buscas km0 o de ocasión, en Wallapop tienes un montón*. The customers will remember the slogans because they relate them to the structure of a proverb. It is enough to mention a few words or structure for customers to reconstruct a well-

<sup>4</sup> <https://sraclara.com/>

known proverb or saying. This establishes a connection of familiarity with the advertising text that is highly commercially effective.

Slogans like *De los cuarenta para arriba no descuides tus encías* (original proverb *De los cuarenta para arriba, no te mojes la barriga*), *Quien bien te quiere... te hará reír* (original proverb *Quien bien te quiere, te hará llorar*) or *En abril, regalos mil* (coming from *En abril aguas mil*) were used in advertising for promoting a toothpaste, a sitcom, and a bank respectively (quoted in Sevilla & Cantera 2002: 275 and Hernando Cuadrado 2010: 72). Likewise, similar examples have been found in advertising campaigns of different products and services: *Nunca digas: este esmalte no lo compraré* (original proverb *Nunca digas de esta agua no beberé*) to advertise a nail saloon; *Es de bien nacido zamparse cada semana un cocido* (original proverb *Es de bien nacido ser agradecido*) has been the advertising campaign of a well-known canned food brand (see figure 5). Both examples have been classified as cases of expansion because both keep the first part of the proverb and expand it with their slogan. Another advertisement of the same food brand (see figure 5) is *El que los domingos no come fabada asturiana, no es persona entre semana*, meaning that you are not energetic until you eat this food as in the saying *I'm not a person till I have my coffee in the morning* has been classified as the only example which combines the adaptation of the saying and also expands it.



Figure 5. Examples of advertisements.

Source: Own elaboration.

One campaign of Google company released the following advertisement *A quien madruga, Google le ayuda*, being the original proverb: *A quien madruga, Dios le ayuda*. A beer company launched a campaign with the slogan *Todo depende de la Cristal con que se mire* (original proverb *Todo depende del cristal con que se mire*); an internet provider used a version of the proverb *Más vale prevenir que curar* changing the last lexical item *Más vale prevenir que formatear*; a poultry company created the slogan *No hay pollo fresco que por bien no venga* after the proverb *No hay mal que por bien no venga* substituting one element; and a well-known fast-food company (see figure 6) created the advertisement *Nuestro tomate ha nacido con un pan bajo el brazo* from the proverb *Los niños nacen con un pan*

*bajo el brazo*. As it can be observed, in the five examples one element of the proverb has been substituted by the product being advertised: *Dios*<>*Google*, *crystal*<>*la Cristal* (beer name), *curar*<>*formatear*, *mal*<>*pollo fresco* and *niños*<>*tomate*. This technique is the most often used to modify proverbs in order to create advertising slogans.



Figure 6. Example of advertisement.

Source: Own elaboration.

By the same process of substitution, the English proverb *Here today, gone tomorrow*, said of things that do not last very long, was transformed into slogans like *Hair today, gone tomorrow* in the hair-removal industry, or *Hear today, gone tomorrow* in a health awareness campaign for a cure for hearing loss and tinnitus of the NYC Department of Health or into a part of the name of the game (*King's Quest VI: Heir today, gone tomorrow*).

Sometimes slogans reinvent proverbs in order to emphasize the value of the promoted product, e.g. *Gallina vieja hace buen caldo*, *Gallina Blanca lo hace mejor*, where the original proverb is *Gallina vieja hace buen caldo*. In this case, the company launched a slogan competition and the winning sentence was used in the advertising campaign. It is the only example found that combines the canonical form of the proverb and expands it to promote the product.

Another interesting example is the slogan designed to raise awareness and educate individuals over the age of 21 who drink alcohol to reduce the harmful when driving, *Think Before You Drink*. It became the Christmas campaign slogan in 1977 in the UK. It was created adapting a proverb from the Bible: *Intelligent people think before they speak; what they say is then more persuasive* (Proverbs 16:23). This slogan has been reused recently to lead a campaign that shows the impact of plastic bottled water:





Figure 7. Example of advertisement.  
Source: Own elaboration.

Another proverb from the Bible (Proverbs 3:27), *Do good and do not look to whom*, meaning to be kind and generous to people, anyone who may need help, even if your actions are not understood and some people will consider you a fool, has been adapted in the advertising campaign of a popular soft drink (figure 8).



Figure 8. Example of advertisement.  
Source: Own elaboration.

The proverb *Money can't buy you happiness* indicates that money can be used to obtain material goods, but not the emotion, happiness, this cannot be bought. The strategy of the advertising campaign of this product, Nutella (hazelnut-based



chocolate spread), has been the substitution of one element, *money* ↔ *you*, and also the adaptation of the second part of the proverb: *but it can make you awfully comfortable* ↔ *but you can buy nutella*. The slogan tells us that, although we cannot buy happiness, what we can buy is this product. Besides, chocolate consumption is also associated with an increase in happiness, so that it is indicated in the advertisement: “and that’s kind of the same thing”, buying this product and be happy equals.

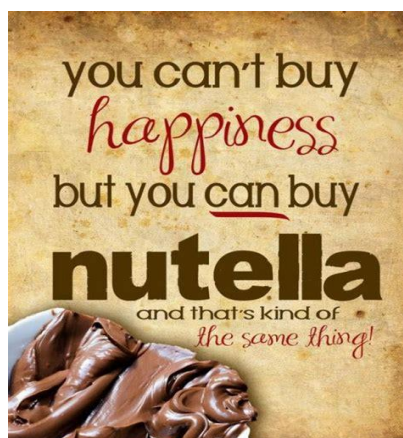


Figure 9. Example of advertisement.  
Source: Own elaboration.

The company Vodafone released a campaign in Spain using a version of the saying *Como en casa, en ningún sitio*, changed to *Como en casa, en cualquier sitio* using an antonym. The idea is that you can leave your home and you can be anywhere having your internet connection just the same. An advertising campaign of the insurance company Mapfre encouraging responsible shopping revolves around proverbs: “*En abril, sequías mil; Ni el 1 de mayo nos podemos poner el sayo: Junio, juniete, seco, sequete; Cuando el grajo vuela bajo, hace calorazo*. Nuestros refranes de toda la vida están en peligro... aunque en nuestra mano está evitar que cambien”. In the first and last cases, the proverbs have been modified using an antonym: *lluvias* ↔ *sequías* and *frío* ↔ *calorazo*. The second one has been adapted from the proverb *Hasta el cuarenta de mayo no te quites el sayo*. In the third one, two elements have been substituted: *nublado, nublete* ↔ *seco, sequete*. Thus, the insurance company wanted to review the climatic wisdom present in traditional proverbs to promote buying local products that is more respectful of our surroundings and the environment.

Several options of introducing proverbs or sayings in advertising have been shown through the examples, as well as the processes of adapting, expanding or substituting part of the elements of the proverbs in these advertisements. Therefore, all the examples provided show that proverbs and sayings, as expressive units, continue keeping an important role in the language of advertising. They reveal the power of the use of proverbs in advertising different products and services. As the study carried out by Kouzas (2019: 151) pointed out,

proverbs are not a 'museum piece' of artistic folk discourse, but on the contrary, have direct relevance to everyday life and in particular to commercial activity (...) proverbs are an integral part of the way they advertise their products.

Our results are similar to those from the study carried out analyzing Portuguese slogans (Vaz et al. 2019: 247-248); also, the study of the use of proverbs in Zimbabwe advertisements (Tatira 2001) which signals their importance in the promotion of products and services. It seems that, as Järv (2009: 266) concluded in his research "What has remained unchanged, however, is the use of proverbs in newspaper, by politicians, and by society at large". Similarly, Piñel López (1997: 498) highlighted about the use of proverbs and sayings in advertising

la enorme vigencia y modernidad de una estructura lingüística que para muchos está abocada a la desaparición. Como hemos podido comprobar el refrán no solo pervive en nuestra sociedad, sino que forma parte de un lenguaje extraordinariamente novedoso, versátil y de suma actualidad, como es el lenguaje publicitario.

The examples from our corpus show changes or lexical replacements when the proverb or saying is used, in many occasions playing with the elements, but its meaning and the idea that the publicists try to transmit by using these elements in the slogan, especially when a product or service is sold, remains. We can therefore confirm that this is not a momentary fashion, as the use of proverbs and sayings continues to play an important role in advertising.

## 5. Conclusion

The presence of proverbs or sayings in the specialized language of advertising in English and Spanish has been attested through the overview provided. Besides, we agree with Tosina Fernández (2017:381) when he points out that, "new technologies and trends have not contributed to their disappearance or abandonment", as it can be seen in the examples compiled in our corpus. He also points out that "on the contrary, with the appearance of the new ways of communication and expression, proverbs have found their way into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and are as present in people's lives now as they ever have been".

Regarding our corpus, it seems that the presence of proverbs or sayings is more common in Spanish advertising campaigns than in English ones, though this can be just related to the corpus compiled. The analysis of the advertisements reveals that in most cases (90.5 %), proverbs or sayings are adapted or modified to capture the attention of consumers. Only five examples use the canonical form of the proverb, while in the majority, parts of the proverbs are substituted or expanded to better link the advertising message to the promoted product or service. The familiarity evoked by proverbs makes consumers feel attracted, as they convey a sense of closeness and recognition.

It is observed that modifications to proverbs or sayings often involve lexical substitutions or the use of antonyms, as seen in examples from websites like Atrapalo.com or Groupalia.com, which play with the proverb *Al mal tiempo, buena cara* to create slogans like *Al mal tiempo, ¡buenos planes!* or *Al buen tiempo, mejor*

*escapada*. This strategy is also used by well-known brands like Nutella or Vodafone to creatively connect with consumers, playing with the expectations associated with popular sayings and proverbs.

Additionally, some campaigns retain the structure of proverbs and sayings but adapt or expand them to highlight the value of products, as seen in a canned food brand slogan that expands the proverb *Es de bien nacido ser agradecido* to make it more relevant in a commercial context. Even biblical proverbs have been transformed for awareness campaigns, such as *Think Before You Drink*, adapting the structure and message for greater effectiveness.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that proverbs and sayings remain an effective tool in modern advertising. Although they are part of cultural tradition, their adaptability allows them to remain relevant and appealing in marketing, connecting with consumers through the creative use of familiar and evocative language. We can conclude that, although the use of proverbs or sayings may have declined in the general language, they are still alive and keep a role in the specialized language of advertising.

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